

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Evaluations of a Bullying Case Involving a Victim with Asperger's Syndrome

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This study investigated how an act of relational aggression is determined to be bullying and how individuals think perpetrators should be treated by examining their perceptions of a bullying case at a university in which the victim admits to engaging in socially inappropriate behavior. Participants were assigned to one of three victim disability conditions: autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, or no disability. They listened to a recording of a disciplinary hearing and made several judgments. Participants who learned the victim was diagnosed with ASD were more likely to make judgments favoring him regarding verdicts, probability of guilt estimates, sentence recommendations, seriousness ratings, ratings of responsibility for the incident, and several perceptions of the victim and defendant compared to participants in the control or dyslexia conditions. The victim's ASD diagnosis may be perceived as a reasonable explanation for behaving inappropriately, and observers may therefore excuse his conduct.